



Shanghai Consulate News for Americans

Issue 35

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This newsletter is published by the American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit, U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. If there are any particular topics you are interested in, please contact ACS at: ShanghaiACS@state.gov.

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- * Take Precautions at Bars And Nightclubs
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- * Be Aware of Tax Scams

Happy Holidays + Holiday Tips

American Citizens Services extends warm holiday greetings. We wanted to remind you of a few tips in preparation for the holiday season. If you are travelling in the region, remember that many countries require six months validity on passports. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide emergency extensions, add pages or issue new passports after hours, on weekends or during holidays. Make sure you check your passports and those of your family members before getting to the airport. To check on requirements for different countries, please visit travel.state.gov and follow the links for international travel. You can look up your destination coun-

try for helpful information.

If you will be requiring services from the Consulate, remember that appointments fill up fast during this season, so please make sure to plan ahead. To make an appointment, visit our website at http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn/appointment_system011309.html

and follow the link to Citizen Services.

Regards,

American Citizen Services

U.S. Consulate General, Shanghai

Upcoming Holidays and Other Closures

The American Citizen Services Unit will be *CLOSED* on the following days:

December 31, Friday:

New Year's Day

January 3, Monday:

New Year's Day

January 17, Monday:

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday

Take Precautions at Bars And Nightclubs

Our colleagues at the U.S. Embassy have received reports of violence against U.S. citizens at bars and nightclubs in Beijing. The most recent incidents began as disputes over small matters, such as spilled drinks or laughter that was taken as a gibe, and then developed into serious altercations resulting in injuries.

In order to avoid becoming the victim of such an attack, please follow these safety tips:

- Pay attention to your surroundings. If you feel unsafe or believe that other bar/club patrons or staff wish you ill will, leave immediately. **Don't stick around on principle.**
- When going to bars and clubs, go with other people. (The more, the merrier, the safer!)
- If you want to go to a new bar or club, learn about it first. English publications geared to the expatriate community may have information about recent criminal incidents.
- Carry a cell phone at all times.
- If you are the victim of a crime or you have been threatened, seek safety. Notify the nearest police station and call the U.S. Consulate at the emergency after-hour number given below.

The U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai can be reached 24 hours per day. During business hours, call 86-21-3217-4650 or email ShanghaiACS@state.gov. For emergencies after hours, on weekends or holidays, call 86-21-6433-3936.

Security Situation - Travel Warnings and Alerts

Security reminder: It is advisable that you and your family review your personal security profile and to be aware of your surroundings at all times.

Since our previous Newsletter, the U.S. Department of State has issued new Travel Warnings for the following countries:

<u>Somalia</u>	12/27/2010
<u>Saudi Arabia</u>	12/23/2010
<u>Cote d'Ivoire</u>	12/19/2010
<u>Haiti</u>	12/09/2010
<u>Mauritania</u>	12/08/2010
<u>Chad</u>	12/08/2010
<u>Central African Republic</u>	12/06/2010
<u>Guinea</u>	12/03/2010

Travel Warnings are issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff. This information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html.

The U.S. Department of State also has issued new Travel Alerts:

<u>South Pacific Cyclone Season</u>	12/23/2010
<u>Indonesia</u>	11/10/2010
<u>Europe - Terrorism</u>	10/03/2010

Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions generally within a particular country or region that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert. This information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html.

The most up-to-date information regarding permitted and prohibited items on flights can be viewed online at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

For additional information, please visit

"Americans Traveling Abroad" on the U.S. Department of State website:

http://travel.state.gov/visa/americans/americans_1252.html. Students traveling abroad may wish to visit the State Department site designed for them: <http://studentsabroad.state.gov/>.

To obtain up-to-date information on security conditions, please call 1-888-407-4747 (toll free in the United States), or +1-202-501-4444 if you are outside the United States.

You may also visit the Consular Affairs twitter page at <http://twitter.com/TravelGov>.



Social Security Administration Q & A

The American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit has compiled a list of commonly asked questions regarding Social Security issues. More Q & A can be found at <http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov/>.

Q: Where can I get Social Security assistance when I reside in China?

A: You may contact the Asia Pacific Rim unit of the SSA International Operations in Manila for assistance. The SSA office in Manila is configured to be like a U.S. stateside district office, providing many of the same services and functions. Its primary function is to administer SSA programs and services for people residing in the East-Asia Pacific Region. Ways to contact the SSA office in Manila are listed below.

Mailing Address:

Social Security Administration
U.S. Embassy Manila

1201 Roxas Boulevard, Ermita, 0930
Manila, Philippines

Phone: (632) 301-2000 8:00 AM to
4:00 PM, Monday through Friday

Fax: (632) 522-1514

Email: FBU.Manila@ssa.gov

Website:

manila.usembassy.gov/wwwaha013.html

Q: Can I apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) at the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai?

A: Yes. You may apply for a SSN at the American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit of the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. ACS will then forward your application to the SSA office in Manila for further processing. Due to varying diplomatic pouch mail pickup times and delays, it typically takes 3-6 months to receive a Social Security card in China. Please consult with the SSA office in Manila or ACS on what to bring before you come to ACS to submit your application.

Q: Is there any way for me to know the SSN sooner?

A: Yes. Since the Social Security card will be mailed directly from the SSA office in Baltimore to the mailing address that you provide on your SSN application, you may wish to give a U.S. mailing address (of say, a trusted friend or relative) on your SSN application. Then, if you wish, you could ask that person to read the SSN to you over the phone and/or send it to you by fax or email. This will help you to avoid an extra 2 to 4 weeks for international mail delivery.

Q: I need the SSN to file taxes (file my income tax return). Can I request to know the number before I receive the actual card in the mail?

A: Yes. You may ask the ACS staff to add a note on your SSN application to request the SSA office in Manila to release your number once it's issued. Since the SSN can only be released when you appear in person, the SSA office in Manila will normally release the issued SSN to the ACS unit of the Consulate, and notify you to come to ACS to pick up your number in person. You may be able to know the SSN through this method in 2-3 months after you submit your complete SSN application to ACS.

Q: Can I apply for a SSN for my dependent to be used to file my U.S. tax return?

A: Your dependent is eligible for a SSN if s/he is a U.S. citizen or has been admitted by the United States for permanent residence or U.S. employment. If your dependent is not eligible to have an SSN, you may apply for an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) instead. To

apply for an ITIN, please 1) complete IRS form W-7, available at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw7.pdf, 2) obtain a certified copy of your dependent's passport from ACS as a notarial service, 3) check the instructions with form W-7 for additional filing requirements, such as the need to include original, completed tax returns, available at www.irs.gov/instructions/iw7/index.html, and 4) mail the completed form, certified copy of your dependent's passport and other documents to: **IRS, ITIN Operation, PO Box 149342, Austin, Texas 78714-9342.**

Q: How can I receive my Social Security benefits when I reside in China?

A: Unfortunately, international direct deposit from the U.S. Treasury Department to accounts in China is not available yet. There are several other ways for you to receive your Social Security benefits payment if you reside in China.

Option 1: provide a U.S. bank account to the Social Security Administration and have your payment sent to the U.S. account. Then arrange to transfer/wire the funds to a local account or make withdrawals via ATM here.

Option 2: provide a bank account located elsewhere in the region if you can. Jurisdictions near China where direct deposit is available include Hong Kong and Japan.

Option 3: provide your address in China and have your payment sent by check to the ACS unit of the U.S. Consulate General. ACS will then forward the check to you via registered mail through the local postal system. Beneficiaries residing in the Shanghai consular district usually get their Social Security checks 4-6 weeks after the checks are issued in the U.S.

Two Tips to Keep Your Belongings Safe

Pickpockets and Bag-snatchers!!

Please keep your eyes (and/or hands) on your belongings. **It's easy to be** lulled into a false sense of security here in East China (Shanghai, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangsu). The level of crime, even here in Shanghai, is generally lower than in comparably-sized cities elsewhere. However, Shanghai is still a **"Big City" with its share of unbelievably** talented pickpockets and bag-snatchers. We receive frequent reports from residents and visitors about the theft of wallets and bags from various

locations – restaurants, hotels, clubs, etc – that they would have otherwise considered quite secure.

Always get a receipt from your taxi driver!!

Ever taken a 'black taxi' - unregistered or off-license taxi before? If it **hasn't happened to you, it's surely** happened to some other Americans. You may lose things in a black taxi and risk never seeing them again. You may also be charged

unreasonably. The best way to distinguish a real taxi from a black one, or to improve your situation if you are already in one, is to ask for a receipt from your taxi driver. The real taxi driver will be able to provide an official receipt with the taxi company's name and a number for complaints. So, take the extra 10 seconds to wait for the receipt from your taxi driver. You may call the police at 110 for help. If you don't speak Chinese very well, you can also call 962288 for free multi-lingual assistance.

Education Hour Consolidated With Tues. Visa Hour

The former Wednesday Education Hour has been consolidated with **the Tuesday American Citizens' Visa Hour**.

The American Citizens' Visa Hour is held by the Shanghai Consulate every Tuesday afternoon from 3:00-4:00 p.m. During the Visa Hour, American citizens may ask questions regarding the non-immigrant visa processes. Since Shanghai does not process immigrant visas, we request that all immigrant visa

questions be directed to U.S. Consulate General Guangzhou (http://guangzhou.usembassy-china.org.cn/immigrant_visas.html).

Visa Hour is designed for information purposes only and not as an opportunity to submit a visa application or to re-adjudicate a prior visa decision. Please arrive no later than 3 p.m. in order to hear important general informa-

tion about the visa process. Only American citizens will be allowed to access this service, and an American passport will be required for entry into the Consular Section. Appointments are not necessary. Citizens of other countries, including Legal Permanent Residents of the United States, may not participate in Visa Hour. Alternatively, inquiries about specific cases may be faxed to the Non-immigrant Visa Unit at (86-21) 6217-2072.

Leaving Shanghai Consular District?

If you are departing the Shanghai consular district after a long stay here and you formally registered your stay with the U.S. Consulate, please do not forget to cancel your registration when you leave.

You can unregister yourself by visiting the <https://travelregistration.state.gov> site if you previously registered through this site.

If you previously submitted a paper registration form to the U.S. consulate, you may unregister yourself by sending an email request to:
ShanghaiACS@state.gov.

Criminal Record Checks and Fingerprinting

U.S. citizens may be asked to present a "certificate of good conduct" or "lack of a criminal record" for a variety of reasons for use abroad including permanent residence permission (visa), school attendance, employment, etc. U.S. law enforcement authorities may not be familiar with such a procedure since it is not commonly requested in the United States. There are a variety of options available to U.S. citizens seeking to obtain proof of their lack of a criminal record.

LOCAL POLICE CHECK: Go to your local police department where you reside or last resided in the United States, request that the police conduct a criminal records search and provide you with a document reflecting that there is no history of a criminal record. Local police departments may require your personal appearance in order to conduct the search. Your local police department can phrase this in whatever way they deem appropriate. The document should then be authenticated for use abroad following our guidance on authentication or legalization of documents.

FBI RECORDS CHECK: The Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/cjis>) centralizes criminal justice information and provides accurate and timely information and services to local, state, federal, and international law enforcement agencies, the private sector, academia, and other government agencies. The subject of an identification record may obtain a copy thereof by submitting a written request to the CJIS (http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/background-checks/background_checks). The request must be accompanied by satisfactory proof of identity (consisting of name, date and place of birth, and a set of roll-inked fingerprint impressions) and a certified check or money order for the \$18 processing fee. The FBI will not provide copies of arrest records to individuals other than the subject of the record. Requests should be directed to FBI CJIS Division, Attn: SCU, Mod. D-2, 1000 Custer Hollow Rd., Clarksburg, West Virginia 26306. If there is no criminal record, a report reflecting this fact is provided.

AUTHENTICATION OF POLICE OR FBI CERTIFICATES OF LACK OF A CRIMINAL RECORD: The FBI's CJIS Division will authenticate U.S. Department of Justice Order 556-73 fingerprint search results for international requests by placing the FBI seal and signature of a Division official on the results, if requested at the time of submission. Documents prepared in this matter may then be sent to the U.S. Department of State Authentications Office (<http://www.state.gov/m/a/auth/>) by the requestor to be authenticated if necessary. Please be sure to indicate the country in which the document is to be used. The FBI procedure became effective 1/25/2010 and will apply only to documents finalized after that date. Requests to authenticate previously processed results will not be accepted. See the FBI FAQ on this subject (<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/background-checks/faqs>).

Documents obtained from your local police will require additional authentication after you obtain the local police seal. **Contact your state Secretary of State's office** or other official designated in your state to authenticate state issued documents. See our general guidance on authentication of documents for use abroad (http://travel.state.gov/law/judicial/judicial_701.html).

GETTING YOUR FINGERPRINTS TAKEN: U.S. citizens should be able to obtain fingerprint cards from their local police departments. Most U.S. police stations will even do the fingerprinting. U.S. embassies and consulates DO NOT generally provide this service. However, you may wish to enquire with a private fingerprinting agencies as below:

- **In Beijing:** "Beijing Tongda Shoucheng Institute of Judicial Expertise Science" (北京通达首诚司法鉴定所). Tel: 010-6290-7011.
- **In Shanghai:** "Forensic Science and Technology Institute" (司法鉴定科学技术研究所司法鉴定中心). Tel: 5235-2957.

This information is provided for reference only and should not be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

Shanghai Consulate News for Americans

U.S. Consulate General, Shanghai, China

1038 West Nanjing Road, 8/F
Westgate Mall 梅龙镇广场

(Méi lóng zhèn guǎngchǎng)

Tel: (86-21) 3217-4650

Fax: (86-21) 6217-2071

After Hours Emergencies:

(86-21) 6433-3936

Open 8:00am - 11:30am

and 1:30pm - 3:30pm

Monday to Friday *Closed on
Tuesday afternoons, weekends,
and holidays.

<http://shanghai.usconsulate.gov>

TAX NEWS

THE IRS WILL NOT BE MAILING INDIVIDUAL/BUSINESS TAX PACKAGES FROM FY2010

Individual and business taxpayers will no longer receive paper income tax packages in the mail from the IRS. These tax packages contained the forms, schedules and instructions for filing a paper income tax return.

The IRS is taking this step because of the continued growth in electronic filing, the availability of free options to taxpayers, and to help reduce costs.

In early October, the IRS sent a postcard to individuals who filed paper returns last year and did not use a tax preparer or tax software.

- Individuals making \$49,000 or less can use the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program for free tax preparation and, in many cases, free electronic filing.
- Individuals aged 60 and older can take advantage of free tax counseling and basic income tax preparation through Tax Counseling for the Elderly.
- IRS Free File provides options for free brand-name tax software or online fillable forms plus free electronic filing. Everyone can use Free File to prepare a federal tax return. Taxpayers who make \$58,000 or less can choose **from approximately 20 commercial software providers. There's no income limit for Free File Fillable Forms, the electronic version of IRS paper forms, which also has free e-filing.**

If you have any questions regarding this alert, please contact the International Program administrators at wi.international.administrator@irs.gov.

A limited number of basic individual income tax forms are available in the ACS waiting room. Every IRS form imaginable is available on their website: <http://www.irs.gov>.

Be Aware of IRS Scams

Recently, some overseas taxpayers have received bogus IRS letters via fax or email requesting them to complete a Form W-8BEN (Certificate of Foreign Status of Beneficial Owner for United States Tax Withholding). While the Form W-8BEN is a legitimate IRS form, it is sent to the recipients by their financial institutions, not the IRS. It is used to establish beneficial owner of financial accounts for withholding purposes.

There are also other types of emails claiming that you are due a refund from electronically filed tax return, and asked for personal information.

The IRS does NOT generally initiate fax or emails to taxpayers, nor does

the IRS discuss tax account matters with taxpayers via email or fax. Moreover, the IRS never requests security-related personal information, such as your SSN or PIN numbers. Please be suspicious of any fax, email or phone call asking for your personal identification information.

How to protect yourself from IRS scams

Taxpayers who receive a suspicious e-mail claiming to come from the IRS should take the following steps:

- Avoid opening any attachments to the e-mail in case they contain malicious code that will infect your computer.
- Avoid clicking on any links for the same reason. Moreover, the links may connect to a phony IRS Web site that appears authentic and then

prompts for personal identifiers, bank or credit card account numbers or PINs.

- Visit the IRS Web site, www.irs.gov, use the "Where's My Refund?" interactive tool to determine if you are really getting a refund, rather than responding to the e-mail message.
- Forward the suspicious e-mail or URL address to the IRS mailbox phishing@irs.gov, and then delete the e-mail from the inbox.

For more information on IRS-impersonation scams, identity theft and suspicious e-mail, please go to <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=155682,00.html?portlet=7>. You may also contact the IRS office in Building irs.beijing@irs.gov if you have further questions.